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LETTER DATED 12 JANUARY 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GEORGIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of a statement issued on 9 January 1998 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia regarding the recent acts of hostage-taking in the Gali region of Abkhazia, Georgia.

May I ask your kind assistance in circulating the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Peter CHKHEIDZE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

98-00567 (E) 120198

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Annex

[Original: English]

Statement issued on 9 January 1998 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia expresses its strong condemnation at the acts of continued coercion against the Georgian population in Abkhazia, Georgia.

On 6 and 7 January 1998, as a result of yet another punitive operation carried out by the armed Abkhaz mercenaries in the villages of the Gali region, Dikhazurga and Tagiloni, 40 civilians were taken hostage, among them women, children and elderly persons. The fate of most of them is still unclear.

Especially worrisome is the fact that this barbaric act took place in the immediate vicinity of the deployed peacekeeping forces of the Russian Federation.

Evidently, the fragile peace and positive steps in the peace process, taken as a result of international efforts, are not conducive to the plans of reactionary forces, which at any expense are trying to retain the atmosphere of destabilization and impunity in the region.

During the peacekeeping operations led by United Nations observers and the Commonwealth of Independent States peacekeeping forces, more than 1,200 innocent civilians have been killed and tortured. Banditry, robbery, trampling of human dignity and vandalism are still widespread.

Cynical and ferocious actions in Dikhazurga and Tagiloni carried out by the Abkhaz mercenaries must be viewed as a continuation of the policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

There is an imminent threat that not only the population of the Gali and other regions, regardless of their creed, but the peace process itself, may become hostage of these reactionary forces, giving way to uncontrollable actions.

The Government of Georgia attaches great importance to the Geneva process under the auspices of the United Nations, with the facilitation of the Russian Federation, and to the wide international participation in this process. The Government of Georgia believes that the Geneva process is the only way for the settlement of the conflict and is therefore very susceptible to actions directed against it, no matter where they come from.

The Government of Georgia expresses its belief that the Security Council, the Secretary-General, his Special Representative and the Government of the Russian Federation will duly evaluate this crime and make every effort to prevent the escalation of tension from creating realistic grounds for reversing

the process of the return of refugees and displaced persons, and for the protection of their rights.

In implementation of the above, the Government of Georgia deems it necessary to reinforce the mandate of the United Nations observers to include police functions, to qualitatively enhance the activities of the Human Rights Office and to seriously consider the commencement of a comprehensive international peacekeeping operation.

Reasonable compromise and the efforts of the Government of Georgia to peacefully diffuse the crisis needs more effective international support.